



**State of Wisconsin**  
**Department of Public Instruction**  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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**\*\*\*\* OP ED ON 4-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN \*\*\*\***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**4K: The best investment we can make is in early childhood**

*By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster*

Wisconsin is one of the few states in the nation that has a strong history of initiating formal education at the age of 4. Not only are we a leader in offering voluntary 4-year-old kindergarten—208 Wisconsin school districts do—the state is pioneering ways to reach out to the community through collaborative approaches for 4K.

In 19 Wisconsin communities, public school educators, child care providers, and Head Start programs have established formal community approaches for serving 4-year-old children. Developing collaborative community approaches to 4K is hard and complex work. It takes courage to look beyond “what have we done in the past” or “how can my program do it alone.” It takes vision, commitment, and flexibility to figure out a new way of blending and maximizing public and private resources for children and families. The underlying theme for successful community approaches is, “What is it that we need to accomplish to educate and care for **all** children?”

Through my work as chairperson of the Council of Chief State School Officers’ Task Force on Early Childhood Learning, I am committed to helping communities at the local, state, and national levels establish community approaches to 4-year-old kindergarten. Nationally, we are advancing with greater public awareness and legislative and fiscal support for 4K.

We know that the vast majority of brain development takes place in the earliest years of a child’s life. A child’s first five years lay the foundation for all future social, emotional, and cognitive development. Research studies support both the educational and economic value of 4-year-old kindergarten. Giving more children the opportunity to attend 4-year-old kindergarten allows educators to close the achievement gap before it begins. Not only do 4K students do better in school, research shows there are fewer referrals for special education and students are more likely to graduate.

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Quality early childhood programs and 4-year-old kindergarten are among the best investments we can make in our children and our economy. It makes sense to help our children get started early on the road to learning and becoming productive, contributing citizens. The governor's 2005-07 budget included provisions recommended in my Department of Public Instruction budget to provide start-up grants to help communities that want to begin 4K programs. The educational reasons are solid and the business case is strong to support 4K in Wisconsin.

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*Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.*

**NOTE:** To download a high resolution photo of the state superintendent, visit the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/sprntdnt/media.html> >.